

Côte des Neiges Presbyterian Church
3435 Côte Sainte Catherine Road
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June 12th, 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

On Tuesday this past week, Bill C-14 went into effect, and here I quote the Canadian Federal Government's website, the Bill makes changes to the criminal code "that ... give[s] dying patients, who are suffering intolerably from a serious medical condition, the choice of a medically-assisted death." Your elders and I thought it was important to remind you of several basic things that we hold to be at the center of our Christian faith.

Life is a gift from our loving God who created it with purpose. Each one of our days are in His hands and the path and purpose and length of our lives are marked out by His sovereign will. The psalmist reminds us that our lives begin at conception by His powerful creative force working in our mother's womb, and the Scriptures confirm that they are meant to end when He, and only He, by His kind will graciously brings our last breath to an end.

While the world around us has become far too addicted to quick resolutions and immediate painkiller solutions, fleeing hardship to pursue pleasure, the very example of Christ at the heart of our faith is a reminder of the powerful redemptive value of suffering. Many of you, like me, have sat by a hospital bedside and tasted the bittersweet fellowship that occurs during the final days of the illness of a loved one. All of us have at one time or another realized that the moments of greatest growth in our faith and of deepest closeness with God inevitably come not in the middle of pleasant sunny days, but more often during times of deep struggle and often in the midst of pain and suffering.

While our calling to Christian compassion leads us to do all we can to alleviate unnecessary suffering, and in particular to come alongside the dying at their moment of great spiritual and physical need, our belief in the sovereignty of God and in the sanctity of life that He has created and that only He can justly end, always makes us stop short of taking into our own hands the decision to end our own lives, or to end somebody else's.

Because we have major concerns with this new piece of legislation we have urged you in weeks past to make your voices heard to your elected officials. While this bill has now been passed into law, we nevertheless believe that there are several concrete steps that we are still called to take.

First, we have a number of Christian brothers and sisters in the health care network who will from now on be facing increasingly difficult demands that will clash with their Christian convictions about the sanctity of life. We need to hold them up in prayer. As the details of the

legislation are worked out, and as court cases in the coming months affect the interpretation of the legislation, we need to continue to make our voices heard as these individual cases will create the precedents and the jurisprudence for this new law.

Secondly, we need to communicate our high regard for the sanctity of life not just by our words and our petitions to our elected officials, but also through our tangible actions. We have within our congregation, and within our wider circle of influence, a number of people advancing in years, and some progressing in struggles with difficult illness. By our care for them, by the way we esteem them and cherish them, by the way we come alongside them in their moments of need, we must communicate to them and to the watching world that every individual has dignity, and that every day that our sovereign God grants is a gift to be treasured.

Thirdly, this bill raises concerns about those who are vulnerable, including many who struggle with mental illness. The church has not always done well at helping in this area, and you and I need to commit ourselves together, to expressing our high regard for human life in the way we welcome and come alongside those who struggle, whether their challenges are physical or otherwise.

May God give us grace and wisdom together, to cherish and to protect each and every life that He has created, showing His compassion and care to those who most need to experience it.

Rev. Joel Coppieters, B.Th., M.Div